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ABSTRACT

The role of distance education as a vehicle for delivering continuing education in Asia was examined from the following standpoints: facilitating development amidst poverty; making human resource development the prime strategy; overcoming the stagnation of education amidst wrenching change; and using distance education to accomplish those continuing education goals that the formal education system has not been able to accomplish by dissolving the limits of time and space in classrooms. The following points were made regarding incorporating distance education in continuing education programs were suggested: identify the problem in the continuing education program first and only then devise a distance education program to solve it; recognize that using distance education in a program requires much more planning and a longer gestation period than use of classical teaching methods does; use mass technologies only if there is a mass clientele; plan and operate the technologies on a team basis; and ensure that the technology used permits adequate feedback about students' learning. Selected activities conducted as part of the Asian Development Bank's initiative in distance education were examined along with possible applications of distance and continuing education concepts in the areas of women in development, environmental protection and development, and poverty alleviation. (MN)

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DISTANCE EDUCATION FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION

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at the Regional Workshop on
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DISTANCE EDUCATION FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION[1]

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Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Chairman: I am most privileged to have been invited by the Colombo Plan Staff College for Technician Education, to share with you some insights and experiences on the use of distance education for continuing education. I would like to start my presentation with a discussion of some basic concepts that will provide a proper background to this theme. The universal elements of these basic concepts of distance education for continuing education may be skillfully adapted for application in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

DEVELOPMENT AMIDST POVERTY

1. **The Disadvantaged Must Be the Prime Beneficiaries of Development.** Without vision, the prophets say, a nation perishes. So it is with our global community. Decisions about our future must be made now. But these decisions must not begin with the traditional approach of designing and specifying physical targets or material wealth. Our global vision must start with the prioritization of the values that ensure the fullest development of mankind. And the value that counts most is one which categorically states that the primary beneficiaries of development decisions ought to be the underprivileged members (particularly the rural disadvantaged and the women) of developing societies. Indeed, the development theories and strategies through the decades have undergone drastic changes as a result of failures and disappointments. Now there is a need to develop new and innovative interventions which will directly involve the beneficiaries. Such an emphasis is urgently needed in the light of today's pervasive culture of poverty. Poverty is bound to grow if effective steps are not taken immediately.

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2. The question is: do development initiatives work? What kind and how? The answer is a qualified yes - at least from the viewpoint of experts, academics and regional and international institutions with western growth-model orientations. Development in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s has seen a number of variations of a single theme: growth with equity premised on human resource development. What is noticeable about all the development indicators, however, is the primordial position of economists, planners, technocrats, academics, and administrators. Using money as the main yardstick of development, indicators were formulated that govern all growth development measurements today: gross national product (GNP), per capita income (PCI), gross domestic product (GDP), debt/equity ratio, import/export indicators, etc. In the 1950s and 1960s, when aids and grants from international agencies went mostly to engineering and infrastructure projects, these indicators served their purpose.

3. However, development is not simply GNP growth but essentially reduction of poverty and an assured quality of life through removal of the social and economic inequalities which give rise to poverty and unemployment. Therefore, when in the 1970s more investments were poured into human and social capital improvements, things became quite complicated. How was one to apply the neat and clean engineering formulae and ratios to the schooling of illiterates, children, continuing education for adults, programs for the rural disadvantaged, rehabilitation of slum areas, the social diseases that came with squatter colonies, the hospitalization of the aged, and, now, the mobilization of NGOs to work with the rural disadvantaged? Again, the experts mobilized were the public administrators, economists, sociologists, educationists, trainers, statisticians, anthropologists, and community workers. One could not doubt their commitments, intentions, or capability.

4. But one asks: what about the disadvantaged? What do they say? What do the beneficiaries of development think about all these prognostications of intellectuals and technocrats? It is apparent that there are technical problems on how to solicit feedback, get practical answers or opinions from the illiterate, malnourished, dysfunctional, jobless, and disadvantaged who are the rationale for development programs and projects. They are the reason for donors. The difficulty is, despite the experiences and the vast literature on development available today, there is still a tremendous dearth of information on exactly how to mobilize the disadvantaged, and coax them into articulating their inner sentiments, goals and desired ways of participation.

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AS THE PRIME STRATEGY

5. And that is why, to me, the fundamental strategy for any development must begin and get its greatest momentum from human resources and their full development. If we are to listen to the disadvantaged, learn from them, they must be helped to be able to do so. The disadvantaged are not inherently weaker than the educated or the urbanized, nor less brilliant or capable. They have been deprived of opportunities for their development (including education), become the victims of social injustice and economic inequities spawned by myriad factors in society. Therefore, education of people in general and the disadvantaged, in particular, by learning both audio visual literacy skills and technical/vocational skills as well as learning about how society functions inequitably becomes a development need. This need for education is not only a social and moral imperative; it is also an economic necessity.

6. The education and training of a skilled workforce including technicians and professionals make large contribution to the human resources development. A well-knit system of technical vocational education (TVE) is a barometer measuring the stage of human resources development. The TVE system produces a competent workforce which is a necessary condition for increased productivity, thus making a valuable contribution to economic development. How to change skilled workforce adaptable to ever changing technology in an efficient and effective way is a challenge and developing countries in a world having a technology basing international competition. The TVET systems of Asia-Pacific countries must explore all strategies to meet this challenge. Distance education for continuing education is one of the attracting opportunities.

CHANGE AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

7. **The Stagnation of Education Amidst Wrenching Change.** Change, wrenching change, has marked the 80s and the 90s. There also have been mind-boggling developments in science and technology, genetics engineering and medicine, chemical industry, etc. But — in examining this wide array of changes — one is dismayed by the little progress that has been made in the field of traditional education methodologies. It almost appears to be at a standstill despite the tremendous resources poured into formal education. Formal education is uniform in structure and content with a heavy emphasis on cognitive objectives. In contrast, real society is heterogeneous and varied. Thus it is difficult to acquire behavioral (including affective and psychomotor) skills for such a society in a closed institution such as a school. Formal institutions are slowly becoming aware of their limitations and are attempting to reach a wider public.

Many technical schools organize evening classes for vocational training for out-of-school and elderly people. In addition, the rapid evolution of society and the growing pace of technological innovation make it necessary for the individual to keep up with developments after leaving school. Therefore, the need for continuing education, in Asian region (and in the world), has grown faster than the growth of population. Furthermore, the modernization of the economy depends on the ability of the people to apply individually the latest developments of technology. And, in turn, because of the needs-based nature of education, continuing education will play a larger role in increasing individual productivity.

CONTINUING EDUCATION

8. The formal education system has not been able to do what was expected concerning continuing education for the adult population (including technical-vocational education persons) due to various reasons. In addition, we have started questioning the formal system's efficiency and appropriateness for modern society. It is in this context that I now turn to continuing education. While continuing education two decades ago was seen from the angle of the right for the individual to learn throughout life, now it is more a question of national competitiveness. A modern society characterized by complexity and change puts increasing demands on the education needed for its citizens to cope with their life in society. These demands suggest that the initial general education must establish a broad and general level of competence, relevant to modern society and sufficient to form the necessary basis for continuing learning during the whole life span. Also, the future demands from the labor market will require increasingly specialized training and more frequent updating and retraining than before. This will also require people to develop multiple competencies across occupational borderlines. There is, therefore, a need for more flexibility and alternative organization of study programs and mixtures of programs. Initial and continuing education will no longer be seen as separate phenomena. There will be greater integration of working and learning institutions. More flexible forms of organizing learning opportunities will develop.

9. Continuing education renovates knowledge and skills needed to keep up with the tempo of changes taking place in science and technology. Continuing education is directed towards an adult population desiring and demanding greater knowledge with which to interpret a constantly changing world environment. It addresses the educational demands in a dynamic economy which are drastically different from those of a static economy. Continuing education is the continuity and link between the curricula of school and out-of-school learning. The education period, instead of being restricted to school age, extends throughout a person's whole life. Such an education must prepare

people for various complementary roles and must help reconcile continuity and change, humanistic and technological values. An important aspect of the concept of continuing education is its universality — the program must cover every individual. This is the existence of democracy and the only foundation on which an equal and just order can be based. Continuing education which embraces individual study, work experience, the education value of the family, and leisure can help to solve problems of society.

10. Continuing education allows the students freedom to choose their subjects according to their goals and means. It also encourages self-agement of time and helps gradually develop methods of self-assessment. .. continuing education the capacity to acquire knowledge is given precedence to help people become creative and critical. Emphasis is placed on the acquisition of tools of knowledge and expression through systematic training, "Teaching to Learn." Its aim is to equip each individual to become both the object and the instrument of his or her own self-development through the many forms of self-education. Distance education will be at the center of this new pattern of education. The motivation of the individual, the sense of innate curiosity, which is the main motivation for continuing education, should be aroused and lasting habits of self-study should be inculcated. There is also call for spiritual development to maintain a balance between the technological and humanistic values of life through enhancing the ability to understand fellow human beings and the environment. Thus, continuing education could take care of human development in its totality, taking into account the interaction between the individual and his or her environment and the ultimate goal of the fullest inner development of the personality.

DISTANCE EDUCATION

11. As long as the numbers involved in the education system were small (as in the ancient hierarchical systems where "learning" was the preserve of a -in social group, the patrician, the aristocratic, the mandarin, the mullah or the Brahmin), the teacher-centered and oral-based learning system could and did function effectively. But once education became horizontally universalized and vertically never ending (which is the need-based approach to education), the teacher had to be supplemented by books, charts, audio visual materials, programmed instruction, radio and TV, multi-media packages, and a whole armory of instruction and self instructional media which we term education technology. A silent revolution in education is taking place all over the world. It is the emergence of distance education as an alternative system of education. Distance education, based on a multi-media approach, is an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone

removed in space and/or time from the learner. In recent years, distance education through the establishment of open universities has been increasing in several countries — developed and developing, socialist and non-socialist. The economic realities of trying to provide universal education through conventional systems has forced governments in the Asia and Pacific region to search for cost-efficient ways to provide fair and equitable access to education.

12. We are in search of educational technology for the disadvantaged (including people in the rural areas in Asia-Pacific): they are the people most in need and who should in any development plan of any country, serve as the primary beneficiaries of educational technology. The technology that works best is determined on the basis of what can be absorbed and not on the basis of what is highly sophisticated. Technology for the disadvantaged must be useful, productive and have threshold norm of excellence so that the disadvantaged can share in the benefits of modern technology. The depth, range and impact of the right technology can bridge centuries in underdeveloped villages the village classroom can be brought to the modern age via sight and sound.

13. In Asia, a number of countries have started open universities during the last decade. Open Universities are already established in Bangladesh, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand. In this region, distance education is currently servicing education and training through a wide variety of courses at levels ranging from literacy programs to higher degrees, and assisting the disadvantaged and those residing in far-flung rural areas to develop functional literacy, livelihood skills, self-reliant enterprises, and information useful to their own personal growth. Distance education is the means for millions of teachers, new and in-service, to upgrade themselves; for government employees to achieve higher educational levels; and for millions of farmers, extension workers and rural families to get up-to-date market information, more employment skills and production know-how. However, the use of distance education in TVE is still evolving. This is where we need to pay our attention more closely. In areas where development is too fast for the formal education system to keep pace with by ordinary measures, disseminating the effective updating of knowledge is an important role of distance education. In addition, without detracting from the achievements and usefulness of the schooling system, the overriding concern is how to promote self-reliance as a strategy for education — especially for the deprived. Such liberation will ensure that once equipped with self-learning capabilities, learners will become their own best teachers and will not be dependent upon the provision of a school and a teacher to acquire knowledge. Liberation of the learner is the ultimate mission, and self-reliance the strategy for education.

14. The distance education strategy entails not having the learner come to school, but having the school reach out to learners and enter their very homes. This is now possible because the broadcast media, particularly radio, can reach virtually all corners of the world today. The use of radio for educational purposes allows students, especially girls, to continue their farm and home chores without disruption, while they assimilate lessons from broadcasts. With the additional provision of distance education support services, including printed material, scheduled tutorials and lectures on-site, group work sessions, etc., students can develop enthusiasm and commitment for learning with the ultimate goal of becoming self-reliant. As modern information technology penetrates our societies, forms of technology-based learning will emerge. This will not mean that technological devices will replace teachers, rather that both learners and teachers will take advantage of new means of handling information and new means of communication. Such a scenario need not only be a dream, it could be a reality, even today. It is essential that educational policy-makers re-examine their commitment to traditional formal schooling, and consider seriously the efficacy and cost-efficiency of multi-media distance education technologies to realize the goal of education for the deprived. In the 1990s, distance education, based on the use of modern communications and multi-media materials, is predicted to be the major new movement in human resource development. Modern information and communications technologies have given us a broader range of options than we had some years ago, and new options will certainly arrive in future. Through the use of new communications, access to good educational programs can greatly be extended to large audiences in rural and remote areas with tremendous flexibility in subject matter content, in locations served, and with a choice of narrow or wide band formats. In short, the reduced costs of technology could make a large number of educational services available, through distance education, to more and more people on a global basis. Furthermore, effective coordination through regional cooperation could help realize the potential of the remarkable communications technologies available to mankind.

15. **Dissolving the Limits of Time and Space in the Classrooms Through Distance Education**. The area of education which is considered to be fastest growing today is distance education. It is a powerful means to utilize telecommunications technology to disseminate teaching experiences, ideas, and information, to produce two-way exchanges between the teacher and the learner, and to bridge time and space limitations. This can initiate a process for developing total education and training mechanisms in the 21st century. In Third World countries inexpensive technology will allow everybody to hear, talk and see each other, and interact with prominent people and specialists. Distance education can conquer the restraints imposed on traditional modes of education by time and space. The question is not whether developing countries can afford

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the peaceful uses of outer space through the use of satellite technology. Rather, it is whether they can afford to ignore them.

DISTANCE EDUCATION AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

16. I now turn to distance learning in continuing education. And within the context of lifelong education, distance learning offers a wide array of programs — the continuing education of post primary or primary school drop outs, the training of workers to become shop supervisors, the upgrading of clerical techniques, upgrading of teaching skills, updating of technical skills from those of information specialists up to those of scientists and engineers. In continuing education, which takes place largely outside the formal school and university system, distance education is more widely and boldly used than in the formal system. It is my hope that this use of distance education in the various education and training programs run by companies, cooperatives, trade unions and some educational institutions for their extra mural clients, can be adopted by the formal system and help instigate the restructuring that it urgently needs.

17. Continuing education programs can be strengthened through the effective use of distance education to balance inequalities between age-groups. It is much less expensive than formal system to organize 'second chance' education for those who left formal education after completing secondary education and want to upgrade their education in order to compete for better jobs. Distance education can effectively expand the capacity of education system in new fields while extending geographical access to education. Continuing education programs dealing with information and education campaigns for large audiences can benefit from the use of powerful mass media. For example, environmental protection is a subject of relevance to the whole population. Continuing education supported by distance education can educate large audiences on the subject. Distance education has an important role to play in implementing curriculum changes. When curriculum changes are introduced in the school system, specific teacher training programs may be needed for considerable numbers of teachers in a very short time. An effective way of doing this is through distance education. Finally, in modern society, people tend to develop competence in more than one field and to change their occupation several times during their life span. Continuing education through distance learning is an optimal way of developing new competencies.

18. With a view to further improving the use of distance education in the continuing education program, I end by suggesting some areas for reflection and action. In a continuing education program, the problem should first be identified and then the distance education program should be devised to meet it. There is

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sometimes the temptation to say, here we have a teaching machine, let us build a program around it. This is the sure path to failure. Distance education in continuing education program should be problem oriented. Second, the use of distance education in a continuing education program requires much more planning and a longer gestation period than the use of classical teaching methods. The use of distance education calls for establishing an orderly progression and sequencing of the various steps, reviewing the content and form of teaching against the identified problem and/or objectives as well as target groups. There should be no shortcut in the use of distance education methodologies. Third if mass technologies are to be used there should be a mass clientele. While it is true that the economies of scale can be most dramatic in the use of distance education it is equally true that the unit cost can be astronomical when the size is inadequate. Fourth the technologies should be planned and operated on a team basis. There can be no loners in distance education. The team may be the engineer, the pedagogue and the sociologist, or it may be the teacher and the studio programmer, out of which will arise new forms of team teaching. Finally, built into such technologies are the need for feedback systems. TV and Radio are blind one way media. Education is the result of a dialogue, learning is essentially a confrontation. The high quality content going into the technology is necessary but not sufficient. There must be a system of identifying and learning — from what happens to the trainee using the technology. It is only then that the technology will combine the learning process of the learner with the problem solving end product.

BANK'S INVOLVEMENT IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

19. The Asian Development Bank's (ADB) initiative in the distance education arena stems from a professional staff paper published by the ADB's Education Division in 1985. This paper laid the ground work for a major Regional Seminar on Distance Education which was organized by ADB in Bangkok in 1986. The Bangkok Seminar gathered together a group of internationally renowned distance education experts and the papers presented for the Seminar (now published in two volumes) are recognized as a seminal resource in the field As a follow-up of the recommendations of the Regional Seminar, ADB sponsored a Round Table Conference on Distance Education for South Asian Countries in 1989, which was held in Pakistan. The function, form, operational feasibility and financial viability of such a mechanism provided the central agenda of the Round Table Conference. In addition, the ADB has financed an Open University Project in Bangladesh. Also the Teachers' Training Project in Pakistan prepared by ADB involves distance education for teacher training. ADB is considering increased involvement in distance education in other developing member countries.

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OTHER AREAS OF INTEREST

20. There are three complex areas of particular interest for applying distance education and continuing education concepts and techniques. These three are: (i) women-in-development, (ii) environmental protection and development, and (iii) poverty alleviation.

21. **To Educate Women is to Educate the Nation.** Approximately two-thirds of the world's illiterate adult population are women. There are 80 million more boys than girls enrolled in primary and secondary education. In developing countries, two-thirds of women over the age 25 have never been to school. Women are under-represented in positions of educational authority. Positions involving decision- and policy-making at all levels of schooling are invariably held by men. Just as clearly as education is no guarantee against poverty, social injustice and powerlessness, the reality is that wherever these exist, women and girls suffer the most. Continuing education supported by distance education methodologies can help homemakers improve their status. Distance education offers formal learning opportunities to people who would not otherwise have access to schooling. Furthermore, distance education can be "gender-sensitive" to the needs of women.

22. **Protecting the Environment from the Onslaught of Ignorance.** For the development of natural resources to be sustainable, people must be aware of the environmental problems involved. Their awareness is necessary precondition to their cooperation with the effort. Given the limited reach of the print media, it is important to use radio and television for continuing education to spread the message on environmental matters to the public. In fact, the electronic media may be the only means of reaching the many geographically and economically isolated segments of society. The continuing education programs would go to the general public, particularly to the segments of society who are directly affected by environmental measures. In this task, the role of radio, and where appropriate TV, will be emphasized, with adequate training and facilities needed to handle the messages.

23. **Education Without Literacy**. What can distance education do for the alleviation of poverty? It can shatter the myth that the disadvantaged must first be literate before they can be educated. For distance education can reach disadvantaged people at their homes via radio, and inform and educate them on needed skills and knowledge for livelihood, without their having to read and write. Through such information, continuing education can arouse among disadvantaged families a sharing of values and ideas through group radio sessions; better yet through TV assemblies at the village center. Mass media such as TV and Radio can bring the voices of leaders from their headquarters in

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the cities to the very doorsteps of the disadvantaged, and motivate them with information to help provide the right orientation, attitudes and work ethics, as well as the knowledge and basic skills for self- and family-improvement.

24. **Bringing High Tech to the Homes of the Disadvantaged.** This bring us to another question: high-tech for the disadvantaged? Why not? Modern science and high-technology can undoubtedly be brought to the service of the disadvantaged people (the poorest of the poor, or the deprived, in the inal words of Mahatma Gandhi), to the deprived rural communities, to the most far-flung villages, and achieve a better quality of life for them in ways that are more rapid, more innovative, more interesting and more participatory, than traditional classroom methods of educating people. The conservative approach which proclaims that sophisticated technology can be adopted only step-by-step by developing countries has often been proven counter-productive. The noted Indian scientist, the late Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, explained that, and I quote:

> "...a developing nation following a Step-by-Step approach towards progress is landed with units of Small Size, which do not permit the economic development of new technologies. Through undertaking ventures of uneconomic size with obsolete technologies, the race with advanced nations is lost before it is started."

SOME BASIC ISSUES

25. **Liberating Distance Education From Its Own Restrictions.** At times, educational technology is compared with instructional industrialism through the distance education mode. Here the main issue is that this strategy is founded upon theories of learning which treat students as "objects,: passive receivers of advice and knowledge. It is generally believed that the knowledge produced through distance education is tightly linked to forms of materials that reinforce dichotomy between teachers, who dominate, and students, who are the dominated. Distance education teachers select and shape the knowledge that the students need to advance themselves. The principal activity of distance education is "packaging" knowledge in a series of learning activities. The social relations involved in and expressed through their transformative processes are usually invisible to the students.

26. The pedagogical approaches used in distance education are monologic; dialogue, in most of the situations, is seen as impossible. Distance education, some say, could be used to stop self-directedness in learning and for political and social indoctrination.